2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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565 769 771 exclusively related to the aristocratic tradition, and no account will be given or analysis made of ancestor cults practised by those groups in the two Ngoni kingdoms who were not of the leading clans. In the ancestor cult, as it will be described here, the emphasis was always on known and named spirits of the dead, associated with the village where the ritual was performed. In the approach to these known and named spirits—an approach which I have called a cult—there were three essential components: the diviner, the ritual address and the cattle. The diviner's role we shall discuss in Chapter III and the ritual forms of addressing the ancestors in Chapter IV. The Ngoni believed they could not approach their ancestral spirits except through their cattle, which had first to [825] show that the spirits agreed to prayers being made, and the sign was that the beast urinated. The sacrifice of a beast was an integral part of the rite, which was concluded by the suppliants eating the meat together. At no point in their common life did the Ngoni more clearly demonstrate their dependence on their cattle than in the ritual of addressing their ancestral spirits. For this reason, in Chapter II we shall review the place of cattle in Ngoni life and relate it to their role in the ancestor cult.

Ancestral spirits of the Ngoni Paramounts.

643 769 776 The reigning Paramount and his predecessors in that office held an unchallenged supremacy in the hierarchy of the Ngoni kingdoms. The Ngoni believed that the line of dead Paramounts similarly led the hierarchy of the ancestral spirits, and that the dead Paramounts had power to help the Ngoni nation in time of need. It was taken for granted that when Paramounts died they would continue to be powerful and held in great respect, and that their position in the spirit world would enable them to influence UMkulumqango, the Great Spirit. This Great Spirit was believed to be the creator of all things and the ultimate source of power, particularly of sending rain, success in war, and deliverance from pestilence; and he was in general regarded as the giver of health and strength to mankind. The Ngoni held that those ancestors who were nearest to the living in time, whose names they knew, possessed less power than the remote ancestors whose names had been forgotten. On the same principle UMkulumqango, the Great Spirit, the originator of all creation, possessed more power than any other being, but, since he was so far removed in time from the living, no one could know his praise-names or his genealogy, and therefore he could not be addressed directly. In the same way the remotest ancestors of the Paramount could not be addressed directly because their praise-names were unknown to living men. Only those direct ancestors of the Paramount, whose names and genealogy and praise-names were known, could be addressed correctly and they could be counted on to use their influence with remoter and more powerful ancestral spirits and with the Great Spirit himself.

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As one of the Ngoni said: 'The spirits of the dead Paramounts were the guardians of the whole nation. These *amadlozi* stood between UMkulumqango and the people. They were never worshipped at times of plenty and prosperity, but at the time of crisis and danger.'

In pre-European days there had been two special occasions when the spirits of former Paramounts were addressed on behalf on the whole nation. One was at the time of the *incwala* or first-fruits ceremony, which as we have seen was given up before the final settlement in Nyasaland. This was an occasion uniting all the people with songs and dances at the village of the Paramount. The second occasion was in time of war before the army went out on a raid. This could take place more than once during the fighting season, and always at the Paramount's village.

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The remaining occasions for addressing the spirits of former Paramounts on behalf of the nation were when epidemics threatened, when there was a drought, or in the serious illness of the Paramount or of a leading member of his family. In prayer for rain or for the recovery from illness of someone of the royal clan, the diviner had to be consulted about which of the ancestors of the Paramount should be addressed. The ancestor indicated by the diviner had to be named in the ritual, his genealogy given and, as a rule, his particular attributes and his praise-names mentioned. The following account was given to me by Mlonyeni Jere, who prayed for rain in Elangeni in 1935:

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¶ When the rain stopped, the *amadoda* spoke among themselves 'What shall be done?' If they could not find out who had made the rain to stop, they said 'We must ask the *isanusi* (diviner). Perhaps it is one of the *amadlozi* (spirits) who are stopping the rain.'

If the *isanusi* finds it is the spirit of Hlacwayo, then all the big people are called to come to the kraal at Elangeni. Then they say 'We should choose a black ox with no white spot and bring it to the kraal.' They appointed a speaker who knows how to speak well all the names of the chiefs who have died. This man says to the spirit 'This cow is yours. You must eat it all. Then you must tell UMkulumqango our troubles.' If it urinates or makes dung, the spirits agree. This praying to the spirits is in the kraal in the evening. At early dawn next day someone is sent to kill the ox. While it was being flayed, the huts of the chief wives were smeared with cow dung on the floors and on the place outside the door. The meat was cooked in the kraal by the *amadoda*. Some of it was taken into the *indlunkulu* and kept there for one night so that the spirit might lick it.

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The Paramount had already eaten in the kraal and the meat was divided for the *amadoda* according to their age regiments. After they have eaten, a big man rises up to thank the spirit with his titles and praise-names, and all the people answer *Bayete* and there is a war-dance in the kraal. Then they look up and see clouds coming. Then the rain comes.

This particularizing of the appeal to an individual dead Paramount in the ancestor cult was an essential element in the ritual, and there seemed

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which it belonged, was always given to a woman whose good character was vouched for.[1] The man who inherited the *gogo* village with its particular charge to look after the spirits of the dead, as well as the welfare of the living, also had to be someone of good repute. The responsibility for maintaining social cohesion in a village and among the members of a house with which the cattle, and therefore the spirits, were closely bound up, was one which the senior male members of that house regarded as a solemn duty. If people did not behave well the cattle would not flourish and multiply, and that would upset the spirits and be a sign of their disapproval.

Cibambo wrote the following account of the ancestor cult as a part of the presentation of Ngoni customs to his own people. As a Christian minister he was concerned with making a case to his own people for putting the Ngoni ancestor cult higher in the religious scale than the cults which used images in their worship. He was using his Christian beliefs to rationalize the ancestor cult, particularly in relating it to the concept of a High God. The Ngoni undoubtedly had the idea of a creator, remote and unapproachable by man, as his title implied, but nevertheless referred to as the sender of rain, sickness and other benefits and disasters for the country as a whole. Prayers and sermons by Ngoni ministers in Ngoniland used many of the old Ngoni terms for the creator to express their Christian concept of God.

¶ We think that the worship of the Ngoni was better than the worship of other tribes who were near them, for in their worship there were no images made of wood or stones or other things, but they worshipped spirits who were unseen. Nearly all Central African tribes believe that there is a God who created heaven and earth, and who is unseen by eyes. In worship they could not reach him himself with the things of their hearts, so they did not worship him himself. They followed the custom well known among the black people when they wished to talk to their chiefs or their fathers when there was something of importance. A black man thinks it is a great impertinence and dishonour to speak for himself in front of his chief or his father, so he sends someone of standing as his messenger who carries his words and returns with a reply. This custom took effect also in the worshipping of black peoples. In worshipping the creator they made use of a go-between, who stood between God and men. He knew how to speak for them and pray for them before God. They thought that certain created things ought to accomplish this work.

The Ngoni believed that there was God who was chief of all created things and the source of all. Some of the names they gave him were:

UMkulumqango	The Great Deviser
Uluhlanga	The Original Source
UMkulu Kakulu	The Greatest of All
UMnikazi we Zinto Zonke	The Owner of All Things.

[1] On other grounds, such as kinship, such guardianship might have gone to a woman who was not acceptable on moral grounds and was therefore passed over.

In these names it is clear that God was known as the Beginning of All Things, the Owner, the One Above All. They knew him as the nourisher of the earth, sending rain and all good things, but they thought that he had little knowledge of his people. Nor could his people know much of him, so they did not worship him himself or speak with him. His character they did not know and so they were not able to praise or glorify him as they were the spirits of their ancestors, whom they knew thoroughly. They knew him from afar and so they could not pray and speak to him.

Since the Ngoni were not able to be at home with UMkulumqango so in worship they sought others known to them that they should tell them the things of their hearts, and these were the spirits of those who had died. At once when one of themselves died, they thought that now he is a spirit with living power greater than he had when a man on the earth, and that he is a spirit who can watch over and protect his relatives on earth, but they also realized that he had power to rebuke and punish. So this spirit was added to the spirits of the tribe who were worshipped. They thought that each clan had its own spirits, stretching back to the beginning of the clan. They believed that the recent spirits received the news from their friends on earth, and handed it on until it arrived at the spirits of very long ago and now forgotten. These then delivered the message to the Creator of all.

Cibambo's main intention in this account of Ngoni worship was to put the ancestor cult in its setting as a means of approach to the creator. He used the Ngoni concept of an intermediary, who was essential in the approach to a Paramount, to argue that the ancestor cult was not necessarily wrong but was an earlier stage towards Christianity. This was a theme constantly expressed in sermons and prayers in Ngoni churches. In the rest of this account he emphasized 'becoming an ancestral spirit', which we shall examine later in its ritual context; allocation of authority among the ancestral spirits; and the fact that prayer and sacrifice, which he called worship, were made chiefly in times of trouble, and not in times of prosperity.

It is legitimate, in view of Dr. Kuper's statement, to ask whether there was a fundamental difference between addressing an ancestral spirit as a go-between and worshipping him. The Ngoni were not trained theologians, except for Christian ministers like Cibambo, but they had a range of philosophical concepts to which it is impossible to do justice in this context. In the prayers which I heard their thoughts were focused on the ancestors whose names they knew and recited. Questioned afterwards, they said that there were other ancestors whose names they did not know, but the ones they named could not fail to be aware of the living, their descendants, since their spirits were guarded in a house and their cattle were sacrificed in the ritual. They therefore directed their worship, or address, to those who were known to them, believing that they would influence the remoter but possibly more powerful spirits whose names were unknown. Spontaneous references to

7: Hodgson G-5 (1926) 1933 FR5 Ngoni FR5
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Next day the hunters assemble at the *chiw* with their bows and arrows, spears and dogs; and the women commenced to sow in anticipation of the rain which they knew would fall. Chauwa himself again remained at home, and his deputy alone was allowed to burn the grass after it had been surrounded by every available man and boy in the neighbourhood so that nothing might escape. Such was the reputation of Chauwa that it is said that rain always fell before sunset on the same day. M 789 791

Then the women cooked the goat at the house of Chauwa, who could not himself partake, as he was the director of the sacrifice; and all the other members of his *chisongo* abstained with him. The liver was cooked in a separate pot after it had been tied up with a piece of *mtsiruti* tree in red cloth and genet cat skin. It was then covered over, and any other person was allowed to kill a goat and cook its liver in the same pot. Next morning any of their children who had not yet reached the age of initiation were allowed to eat such part of the livers as had not been consumed by the spirits. The meat of the game killed was divided in accordance with the usual rules of hunting. M [262] M [224]

2. *Rainmaking* (*Ngoni*).

Songandawa's slave wife, Mwachuma, who was brought by Chief Chiwere to the Dowa District, remained there as the mother of all the people and was always referred to as Gogo (grandmother). All the principal spirits of the Angoni were to be found at her village. When rain was desired, Chiwere assembled his Angoni there, and killed four or five black cows, which were cooked and eaten outside the kraal. Then he prayed to the spirits of Songandawa and Gwaza, and poured water into an *nguembe* (wooden bowl), which was covered with another bowl after some of the water had been poured out into a gourd. This praying was known as *upasha*. As the chief prayed, he held the gourd in his hand; and as he invoked each spirit in turn, he poured a little water on the ground. After the last spirit had been invoked, he rinsed his mouth, spat the water out, and emptied the gourd upon the ground. Then the people went home, and rain fell. N 789 [776]

VII.—Tribal Life: Funeral Rites.

1. *Preparation of the Body* (*Chewu*).

When a man dies, the men (usually relations) watching beside him in the hut close his eyes, straighten his fingers and all his limbs, shave his head, wash and oil him, and wrap him in cloths. These cloths must always be new, and though coloured ones may be used, the outside one must always be white. However poor the relations may be, they invariably manage somehow or other to procure a new white cloth. The death is announced at once with the formula "*anatsiriziku*" (he is finished). M 764 M [763]

2. *Disposal of the Corpse* (*Chewu*).

On hearing the news, the men of the village beat drums in the *bwalo* until the following morning, while men and women wail together, uttering cries of mourning, and occasionally breaking forth into expressions such as, "So and so is dead, I am alone in the world"; "God has done evil to me"; "Whom shall I live with now?" "God should have killed me too";

13:Fraser M-5 (ca. 1890)1901
FR5 Ngoni FR5

535 challenge is sent from one group of villages to another. And on the day appointed the strangers arrive walking in procession. The girls and women are dressed in their gaudiest clothes, and their heads and arms are decked with bright coloured beads, and the claws of lions and leopards. The lads carry dancing sticks and miniature shields. The strangers open the dance. The girls standing together and holding reed wands in their hands sing in chorus, while the men arranged in a great semi-circle dance and sing. Their dance is wonderfully energetic and graceful, and is executed with a rythm and unison which is fascinating. You can hear a long way off the hundred feet come down on the earth of the kraal with a thud as of one man. When they have danced for about an hour they give way to their rivals. The home villagers step in and dance for another hour. And so on they go from ten o'clock till about four. There is no mingling of men and women. And the whole exercise is chaste, healthful, and beautiful. It is quite the show piece of our village life.

181 And now a few remarks in conclusion on their religious beliefs. I do not intend to say much on this point as one only can get at the inner meaning of their faith after long and careful investigation, 771 and with a thorough knowledge of their language. Their religion was not formulated. If you ask them about it they can tell you little or nothing. They will deny that they knew anything of God until we came. Their observances were scarcely recognised by themselves, they were the spontaneous and almost unconscious expression of a people groping after the unknown God if haply they might find Him. They recognise a spirit who presides over the universe.

776 They have a name for Him which means the great great one. But the ordinary name is the one which south of the Zambesi is used for all white men, and seems also to imply some feeling of wisdom and greatness. But they seem to have no idea of God's imminence in the world. He is rather the mighty far away Spirit to whom men cannot come. Along with this, homage is made to 771 great mountains and ancient trees, and to the strong elemental forces, as thunder and lightening. But this seems to me to be an [777] addition which has come through their residence among the Tumbuka.

769 The great pervading article in their religious life is reverence and dread of the ancestral spirits. The whole land is full of their presence. And offerings are continually made to them to appease